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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5024

INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1091

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9860

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4303

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1766

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3495

RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0480

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6958

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4575

RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0880

RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0883

RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0594

RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2829

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0474

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001241

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA; PRM/A:TRUSCH AND  
S/CT:TKUSCHNER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/28/2016

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PINS PREF PTER BM

SUBJECT: RESPONSES ON KAREN NI NATIONAL DEFENCE ARMY

REF: A. SECSTATE 133124

1B. RANGOON 1184

RANGOON 00001241 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: PolOff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Little information is available about the Karen Ni National Defence Army (KNDA) outside of open sources.

Post has no information or evidence that the KNDA has engaged in any activities that are considered acts of terrorism, nor has it posed any threat to U.S. national security or to the security of U.S. nationals or allies. The KNDA operates as a proxy of the Burmese Army and reportedly attacked a refugee camp in Thailand in 1997 resulting in civilian deaths. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) We have no information that the Karen Ni National Defence Army (KNDA) or its political wing, the Karen Ni National Defence Party, has engaged in hijacking or sabotage of civilian conveyances. Our local source, Karen Ni politician Raphael P. Thaung (PROTECT) of the Democratic Organization for Kayan National Unity, knows of no efforts by the KNDA to develop, acquire, or use weapons of mass destruction.

13. (SBU) According to the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), after the KNDA split from the Karen Ni National Progressive Party (KNPP) (ref B) and allied itself with the Burmese regime in 1996, it attacked Karen Ni Refugee Camp 2 in Thailand in 1997, killing three refugees and wounding nine others. Some observers suspect the attack was not carried out by the KNDA, whose base was far away from the refugee camp, but by the Burmese Army, which "forgetfully" left a KNDA military uniform at the scene to implicate the KNDA. Although the KNDA has not kidnapped civilians per se, KNDA

deserters reported that the KNDA coerced former KNPP soldiers and Karen villagers to take up arms with them, become porters, or face imprisonment.

¶4. (C) Our sources estimate that the KNDA has no more than 200 soldiers, of whom no more than 50 are armed. The KNDA essentially serves as a proxy army of the SPDC, to provide the Burmese Army a cloak of legitimacy for "defending" the Karen people against the KNPP. Former KNDA soldiers report that the KNDA does not operate independently and follows orders from the Burmese Army. The KNDA joined with the Burmese Army to attack KNPP positions as recently as 2005. According to the KHRG, in recent years, the KNDA increasingly has come under the influence of the Karen Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF), another larger Karen proxy army of the SPDC.

¶5. (C) Post knows of no suspected links between the KNDA and USG-designated terrorist organizations. Post has no information to suggest that the KNDA poses any threat to the security of U.S. nationals or to the security of the United States or its allies.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

¶6. (U) KNPP soldiers Zaw Hla and Lee Reh broke with the KNPP after it reneged on its cease-fire with the SPDC. They formed the KNDA and signed a cease-fire agreement with the Burmese regime on November 5, 1996. Based in Demoso township, ten miles south of the Kayah State capital of Loikaw, the KNDA initially was comprised of up to 150 KNPP soldiers, other Karen civilians, and a few ex-KNPP soldiers whom it coerced to take up arms. According to the KHRG, the KNDA now has only about 35 armed soldiers. Our sources disagree on the full name of the KNDA, which some, including the KHRG, call the "Karen National Democratic Army." The

RANGOON 00001241 002.2 OF 002

Karen refer to the KNDA as "Naga Ni" (red dragons) after their uniform badge. Unlike other KNPP splinter groups, to which the regime granted "special regions," the KNDA apparently received no grants of territory in Kayah State.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: We doubt that KNDA supporters would feel comfortable residing in Karen refugee camps in Thailand that are primarily populated with KNPP supporters. That being said, it is possible that KNDA deserters and their families may have sought refuge in Thailand. END COMMENT.

¶8. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Bangkok and Consulate Chiang Mai.

VILLAROSA